

40 managing panic

for you to know

A panic attack is a short period of very intense anxiety that causes much discomfort. People can learn to manage panic attacks by following some simple guidelines. If you have panic attacks regularly, you should be sure to tell an adult and also your doctor.

Tony had his first panic attack when he was visiting his mother in the hospital. His mom had just had surgery to remove a tumor. As Tony walked into the room and saw his mother asleep in the hospital bed, looking pale and with tubes in her arms, he felt himself becoming light-headed. His heart began to pound, and his stomach was queasy. He began to perspire, and it felt like his arms were tingling. Tony's father noticed that something was wrong. He had Tony sit down in a chair and he called a nurse. The nurse told Tony to take long, deep breaths, which he did for a few minutes, until the feeling subsided. He soon felt better but was shaken up by what had happened. The physical discomfort had come on so fast that it scared him. He didn't know why it had happened and was afraid it might happen again. The next day, Tony was nervous about going to school, but his father said he had to. Tony felt himself worrying all morning, and during his lunch break he went to the school nurse's office.

When Tony told the school nurse what had happened the day before, she said it sounded like he had experienced a panic attack. She told him that people may have panic attacks when they are under strong stress, and seeing his mother looking frail and weak in the hospital could certainly trigger stress. She told Tony that panic attacks are not dangerous and can be handled very simply. Finally, she gave Tony a printed handout with a list of things he could do if he ever felt that way again. Tony felt better knowing that there was a name for what had happened and that he could manage it if it happened again.

The handout the school nurse gave him read as follows:

Using Your Mind and Body to Manage Panic Attacks

Using Your Mind

1. Remind yourself that you are not in danger. You are just having an exaggerated experience of a normal reaction to stress.
2. Remind yourself that you can manage the uncomfortable feelings.
3. Instead of thinking thoughts like, "Oh my gosh, this is awful! What's going to happen to me?" think, "Okay, I recognize these feelings. I know exactly what to do to release them, and I'll do it now."

Using Your Body

1. Find a place where you can sit down. If you are outside, lean against something solid.
2. Begin to slow your breathing by taking long, deep breaths. Remember that breathing deeply will bring the needed oxygen back into your body, stop your heart from racing, and eliminate any tingling or dizzy feelings.
3. Look around and notice all the normal things going on around you. Focus on that normalcy as you allow the fearful symptoms to pass.
4. To relieve your symptoms, do other things that feel comforting to you. Some people sip cool water, some lie down and close their eyes, and some put a cool cloth on the base of their neck.

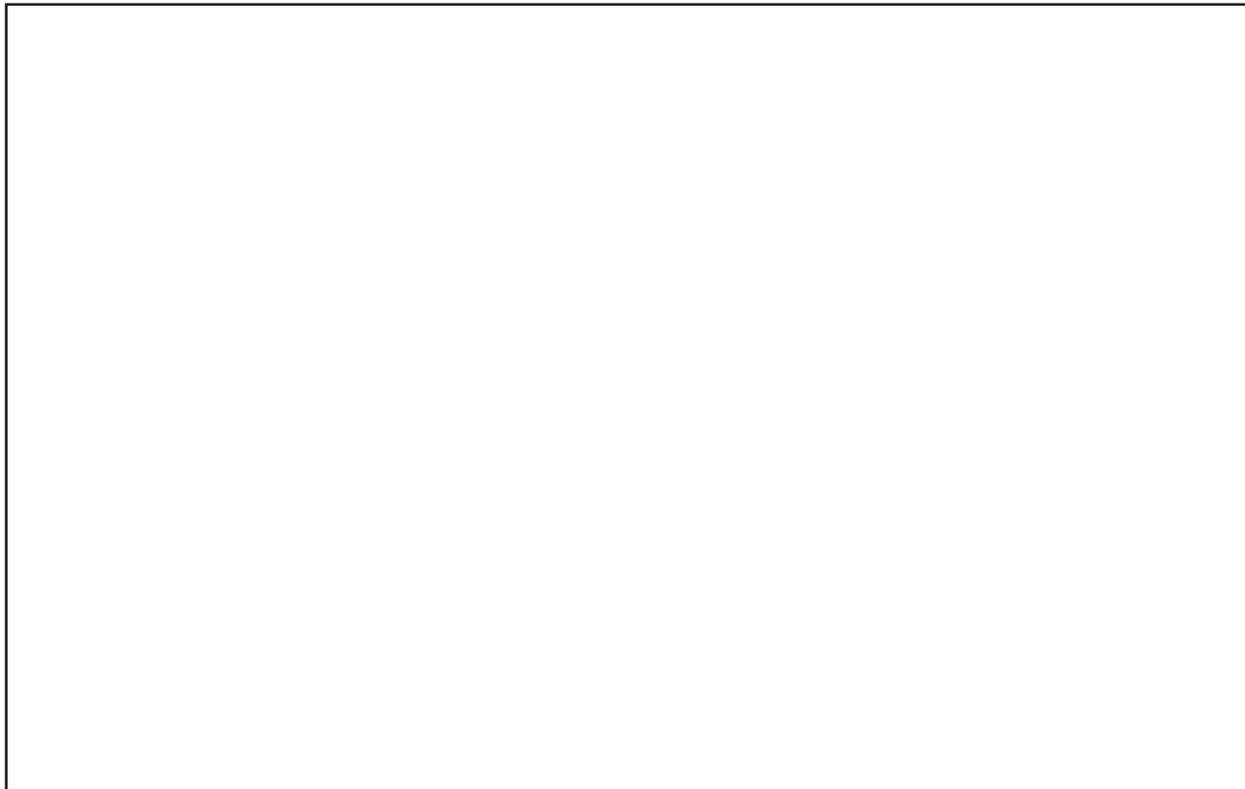
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directions

Circle any of the symptoms below that you have experienced during a panic attack:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| pounding heart | chest pains | sweating |
| light-headedness | nausea | tingling |
| numbness | fear of dying | dizziness |
| stomach problems | chills | flushes |
| shortness of breath | shaking | feeling of unreality |
| feeling out of control | feeling of smothering | feeling of choking |

In the space below, draw a picture of yourself calmly managing your panic symptoms. Use detail to show the comfortable position you are in, the relaxation of your muscles and breathing, and the clarity of your mind. Add a thought balloon, and write in the peaceful, reassuring, confident thoughts you are thinking to relieve your feelings of panic.



more to do

Describe what happened the last time you had a panic attack.

Tell the things you thought or did that made the symptoms worse.

Tell the things you thought or did that made the symptoms diminish.

If you have had more than one panic attack, list the times of day, days of the week, and circumstances under which the panic attacks occurred, as best you can remember.

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Do you notice any patterns in the information you have listed?

If you have panic attacks regularly, keep a diary of their characteristics for the next five to ten times you have them. Describe any patterns you see in the information.

Tell how you can use this information to avoid panic attacks in the future.

Look back at the picture you drew of yourself peacefully managing the panic. As you look at it, breathe deeply and really create the feeling of peacefulness in your body. Close your eyes and picture yourself in your drawing, calmly handling the panic. Know that you can do this whenever you need to.